

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON PUBLIC HEALTH MINUTES TUESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2014

Members present: Dr. Cohen, Ms. Maher, Ms. Lefman, and Dr. Schlaff

Staff present: Dr. Balsam, Dr. Rudisch and Mr. Auffrey

Dr. Cohen convened the meeting at 6:15 and wished everyone a Happy New Year! Members shared their holiday adventures.

The Town photographer appeared to snap a photo for the Annual Report.

The minutes were reviewed. Hearing no corrections, the minutes were adopted unanimously.

REPORTS FROM DIVISIONS

Dr. Cohen reported on the Environmental Health division:

- Division is in the process of renewing permits for Body Art and Tanning establishments.
- Division continues to be busy with the implementation of the Plastic Bag and Polystyrene regulations.
- Division has started to respond to complaints of violations of the Sidewalk Snow Removal By-Law resulting in 23 property violations tickets being issued in the Health Department assigned zone.
- We hope to have a new quiz up next week on hoarding related issues.
- 62 Food Establishments were cited for renewing their permits late. Applicable surcharges have been applied.
- We will have our intern visit various retail food establishments and survey the availability or non-use of Iodized Salt. This is in response to communications Dr. Balsam has sent ACPH members.

Dr. Schlaff reported on activities of the Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention for Youth:

We are working on two warrant articles; raising the age of sale to 21, and creating a no smoking buffer zone around the school.

We held a Mental Health summit in December notes are included at the end of these minutes.

Ms. Minott is looking into a grant from the Brookline Community Foundation for \$5,000 to fund a Family Resource Advocate to ensure all youth, including those from low-income and recent immigrant families, can access the wealth of resources available in Brookline and the surrounding Boston area. The advocate will have a thorough knowledge of the programs and services available to Brookline youth. In particular this project will be a resource for parents and guardians of youth struggling with mental health and substance abuse issues and help them to access appropriate services. Funds will be used to increase hours for Hope Schroy, LICSW, BSAPP Social Worker.

We also just receive a NACCHO grant for \$20,000 for 2 years for our Youth Wellness Project to add to our CHNA grant activities. This is to create a public health campaign to raise awareness of the signs of mental health issues, increase referrals to treatment, and reduce stigma (targeting teens, parents, school staff, and MRC members).

We are targeting youth who are self-medicating their mental health symptoms with alcohol and other drugs, and LGBTQ youth who report higher rates of anxiety and depression.

We had planned a staff mental health training at BHS but got snowed out. Rescheduling for Feb.

The peer leadership class designed the flyer included at the end of these minutes to go in bathroom stalls. This year, the class will be learning more about e-cigarettes and to do a survey regarding e-cigarette use at Brookline High.

Ms. Lefman reported on Emergency Preparedness work:

MRC

As mentioned above, Mary Minott and Ms. Sibor submitted a grant proposal (and received the award) for an innovative program at BHS and using the MRC to bring some of the messages to the community.

Ms. Karsten and Ms. Sibor also submitted a grant proposal to the Mass Service Alliance for money to recruit more MRC volunteers and use current volunteers during National Volunteer Week that coincides with National Public Health week. We hope to hear about this proposal in a few weeks.

MRC volunteers assisted with all four flu clinics for community residents and four for employees of the Town. We had more than 75 MRC-CERT volunteers help this year. Our MRC volunteers are an incredible asset to the health department and town!

In early December, Lt. Virginia Famplare from Boston EMS presented a great program to more than 30 Brookline MRC-CERT members on Critical Incident Stress Management

Seven more MRC-CET members were trained for the Emergency Preparedness Buddies program. I will be meeting with Sue Welpton in the next week or two to begin recruitment of elders, and hope to have the program fully activated in February. We are waiting to hear from Boston about some potential funding to help us with this program.

Miscellaneous

Ms. Cameron has been assisting Ms. Sibor with developing and revising some plans for a medical section for the sheltering plan. Although, the police department/CERT team has the responsibility of setting up a shelter if one is needed, the MRC/health department would most likely be asked to organize the medical/behavioral health section, so want to have plans in place.

Ms. Sibor met with the police at Hellenic College to discuss preparedness. Will be presenting an EP program with the police department for faculty and staff in early February.

Tobacco

November - Mr. Chin met with Matt Baronas and Brookline Housing Authority residents to answer questions and discuss smoke free housing policy to be implemented June 1, 2014. We held seven meetings at various BHA properties.

December - we completed a full round of tobacco compliance checks in Brookline. There were no sales.

Retail inspections, pricing survey, work with Building Dept. to get all 7-Elevens to remove sidewalk signs advertising sale of e-cigarettes.

Dr. Rudisch reported a possible case of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and that we have a dozen confirmed flu cases. The actual number is probably quite a bit higher, since most cases are not lab confirmed. Also, the new Bright Horizons day care will open in April, serving over 100 youngsters.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dr. Balsam reviewed issues emerging for Town Meeting:

Dr. Safer has decided not to pursue a warrant article to ban the sale of non-iodized salt in grocery stores. This is quite a complicated issue. He asked if he could attend an ACPH meeting to chat about the issue of iodine deficits and what to do going forward.

Ms. Steinberg has called us to say that she is moving forward with a warrant article to regulate nail salons. Town Council will let us know if and when she approached their office. We will have to work closely with them to ensure a workable regulation.

Two tobacco warrant articles (mentioned earlier) are being proposed by the Peer Leaders. We will need to take a position after a Public Hearing.

Dr. Rimm has agreed to hold off on an article banning super-sized sodas.

The Annual Martin Luther King event is set for Monday, January 20th from 4pm – 6pm at the Coolidge Corner Theatre. Liz Walker will be the special guest.

The results of the Citizen's Survey should be released in the next month or two. Thanks to Dr. Schlaff, a well-qualified medical student will likely work with us over the summer to abstract health indicators in relationship to socio-demographic variables.

The override, study committee continues to meet. The override vote will likely not happen until the fall or next spring.

Dr. Balsam asked for the input on the title for Health Brookline, Volume 15. Dr. Cohen suggested the term "sexual orientation" be used.

CHNA 18

Ms. Lefman encouraged members to attend the special program linking the Arts and Public Health. A full house is expected.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Maher outlined a broad array of activities for Climate Week, January 20th – 26th. The Health Department is co-sponsoring an Art Installation, Films, and a Brookline Bank window display.

Other highlights include lectures, films, food festivals, art installations, and shows, including a puppet show.

FRIENDS OF BROOKLINE PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr. Auffrey reported that our rescheduled date for the Annual Meeting is February 6th in the Hunneman Hall at the Public Library. The Tab had a big article covering the event which was cancelled due to snow.

The Public Health Policy Forum in June is beginning to be planned. Governor Dukakis is deciding if he wants a title along the lines of "Health Care Reform; A Report Card", that way, we could include national and local issues

NEW BUSINESS

Dr. Cohen and Ms. Lefman were due for interviews at the Selectmen's meeting. There being no further business, Dr. Cohen adjourned the meeting at 7:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Balsam Ph.D., MPH
Director
Public Health and Human Services



WELLNESS COMMITTEE

WINTER 2014

Notes on “Youth & Mental Health: Balancing the Wellness Wheel”

The Public Schools of Brookline’s Wellness Committee examines and supports a variety of programs addressing student health. Now entering its seventh year, the committee addresses a range of youth serving initiatives in areas of nutrition, fitness/recreation, mental health, chemical health, teen dating violence, and climate change awareness.

WELLNESS COMMITTEE SUMMIT ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

On Dec. 5, 2013, Brookline's Wellness Committee summit, **“Youth & Mental Health: Balancing the Wellness Wheel,”** gathered together a select group of school administrators and staff, public health professionals, community members, Brookline parents and students to generate strategies to develop a "whole child" approach to youth mental health and overall wellbeing. Brookline’s recent Student Health Survey, given to all 7-12 grade public school students every two years, reported high rates of anxiety, stress and depression. Yet According to DrugFree.org, less than half of teens with mental health disorders get the help they need, and suicide rates for Americans rose 28% over last decade. More people now die of suicide than in car accidents. Recent events in the media, including suicides in Newton, highlight some of these student mental health issues, which often result in high rates of self-medicating among students suffering from depression

This is a major **disconnect** in our children’s wellbeing, and the **summit helped kickstart a major initiative** to address this gap, bringing together many of the members of our community who are leading efforts toward teen mental health issues. This fostered a cross pollination of ideas with two primary goals -- identify risk and protective factors specific to Brookline that contribute to the high rates of stress and depression among youth, and brainstorm potential strategies to promote positive mental health. Participants included representatives from Public Schools of Brookline administration, health, and guidance, Brookline Parent Education Network, Brookline Teen Center, Brookline Recreation, Brookline Mental Health, parents and students.

WHAT IS BROOKLINE DOING SO FAR?

Much is already being done in Brookline to promote wellness, including:

- Health curriculum in the schools
- B-PEN forums and parent education projects
- Peer Leader campaign to reduce stigma around getting help for mental health issues
- Teen Center and Recreation Department programming for teens that provides healthy outlets
- BHS Guidance Department staff trainings on mental health topics
- Brookline Mental Health Center Liaisons in every school

- A task force to look at mental health services in the schools



CONTINUING STRESS AND ANXIETY

Despite a number of ongoing programs and initiatives, however, stress and anxiety continue to be significant concerns. On the recent Student Health Survey, 75% of all Brookline High School students (93% of girls) reported they felt overwhelming stress or anxiety. At the middle school level, 69% of all students (87% of girls) in grades 7 and 8 reported stress and anxiety, which often leads to a number of health risk behaviors, such as bullying, relationship violence substance abuse. The surprising difference between boys and girls reporting stress was noted.

Primary sources of stress at BHS:

- Schoolwork: females 46%, males 43%
- Future (college, job): females 14%, males 11%
- Family Issues: females 11%, males 7%
- Self esteem: females 8%, males 4%
- Peer issues: females 3%, males 2%

Similar statistics were noted from the middle schools, with a big concern that 10% of girls at this age report issues with self-esteem.

DEPRESSION

While stress and anxiety are a normal part of the human condition, they can also lead to or exacerbate depression, which is defined as “feeling sad or hopeless for a period of two or more weeks such that you stop doing your usual activities.” In Middle School, 16% of 7th and 8th graders reported symptoms of depression, while at BHS, it ramped up to nearly a quarter of all students. Even more troubling, 25% of BHS girls and 17% of BHS boys reported they felt suicidal during the past 12 months.


THE BIG DISCONNECT

While nearly three-quarters of Brookline 7-12 graders admit to overwhelming stress and anxiety, often leading to depression, less than a quarter are actually getting help, though the community has abundant school counselors, social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists. There are also liaisons from the Brookline Community Mental Health Center at all nine public schools in Brookline. This a big gap between student needs and seeking service, and the result is that often students are turning to often self-destructive forms of self-medicating. More than half of students reporting depression report binge drinking, which is more than three times more than kids who aren't depressed. 32 % of heavy marijuana users at BHS reported symptoms of depression (compared with 24% of the population as a whole). Prescription drug abuse undoubtedly factors in as well.

EXPERT ADVICE – Dr. Joshua Eagle

What do we need to know?

According to Brookline Community Mental Health Center Child Team Coordinator Joshua Eagle, normal anxiety has evolutionary value pushing us to move toward goals and change. Optimal anxiety helps us prepare for the future but doesn't impact day-to-day functioning. Managing anxiety is the goal, and for teens, that may be something as simple as reducing academic or activity commitments. But often, anxiety and stress levels are more severe, requiring attention and intervention.



Compounding stress levels in youth is the overwhelming prominence of social media, which has a major impact on teen depression and stress. Studies show young people today spend about as much time involved with some form of media as they do sleeping, especially if you consider they are often using more than one form of media at a time. This daily overuse can make kids more prone to anxiety and depression. Though a balanced use of different media can have positive effects, such as helping introverted kids learn to socialize and providing a variety of tools for learning, it can be very distracting and impact academic performance. It can also make kids feel very exposed, under the microscope all the time, allowing secrets to go viral at any moment. They can feel there is no down time, that they are never “off,” which can produce great anxiety and exacerbate normal feelings of stress.

What are the warning signs of too much stress?

The warning signs of someone in trouble vary from child to child, but one of the major cues is a change in functioning across various domains – family, school (attendance, grade drops), peers (less socializing, different friends, etc.) waning interest in activities. A child’s peers and friends may be the best source of information on behavior and offer an entrée into opening up parent/child conversation.

Note -- depression looks different in teen boys than in girls. Boys often appear angry, irritable, easily upset, qualities that are easier to show than fear or sadness and may mask deeper issues underneath. And in everyone, depression can manifest not only emotionally but physically as well, such as in sleep changes, dietary concerns (eating less or more, major fluctuations from norm) somatic symptoms -- headaches, stomach aches, undifferentiated pain, etc.

How can we promote resiliency?

The best thing we can do for our youth is to encourage them to be well rounded. Sometimes the simple elements that we take for granted – exercise, good nutrition, proper sleep – are taken for granted and fall by the wayside. However, they remain at the core of basic health. As adults, it’s important to model good habits ourselves.

But if a young person needs help, we need to overcome barriers like stigma, access, and cultural differences to get kids proper attention, such as therapy. While many kids will be resistant, which is normal, parents need to take charge and communicate that therapy, even just a couple of sessions, can be the gateway to figuring out what’s going on. At some places, including the Brookline Center, a referral isn’t needed most of time, and insurance should cover mental health just like physical issues.

A primary care doctor is a good first contact. In addition, BHS is blessed with a wide variety of care workers and Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Dr. Karen Shmuckler is coordinating a wraparound approach to provide comprehensive services to students, putting together a resource guide for parents and teachers tailored to each school.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

A critical component of the Wellness Summit was breaking into table top brainstorming sessions to process shared information and come up with new ideas for addressing issues of teen anxiety/depression from four different vantage points: school, family, social groups, and community.

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